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Winchester teen climate action activists vie for seat on Climate Action Advisory Committee

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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High School sophomore Vita Bialiauskaya, left, and freshman Katherine Plosky field questions from the Select Board for the student seat on the Climate Action Advisory Committee. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTOS/CHRIS STEVENS

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If the students who applied to serve on the town's Climate Action Committee are any indication of youth commitment to the problem of

climate change then Winchester and the world at large are in very good hands.

Sophomore Vita Bialiauskaya and freshman Katherine Plosky vied for the one student seat on the committee, fielding questions from the Select Board during its June 17 meeting.

“I am extremely interested and committed to leveraging youth voices in the sphere of sustainability on a local scale, especially Winchester,” said Bialiauskaya when asked why she wanted to serve. “I’m passionate about environmental justice, and climate resilience. And I really hope to make my mark on this town and help with local sustainability efforts in progress.”

Select Board member John Fallon asked Bialiauskaya if she had to pick one area of sustainability to focus on, what would it be.

Stretch energy code, which the board heard about later in their meeting and electrification, she said. She called electrification an important aspect of managing local climate emissions.

“And prioritizing that would be very, very useful for both Winchester as a town and its reflection on global carbon emissions,” Bialiauskaya said.

Having served on the Climate Action Advisory Committee the prior year as a non-voting member, Board member Anthea Brady asked Bialiauskaya what she’d learned in that time.

Bialiauskaya said she thoroughly enjoyed her time on the committee and largely learned about the importance of collaboration. She also said she learned just how important it is to elevate youth voices within the climate change space, and to keep making progress for future generatio

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Not to be outdone, Plosky has already been serving on boards and committees on a larger scale, but mainly in online groups. She said she was looking for an opportunity to make a local impact.

Brady asked her what drew her to the position and if she'd watched any of the Climate Action Advisory Committee meetings or spoken to members.

"What really drew me to it is I've been going to meetings with a statewide committee that is working to bring climate resilience to schools," Plosky said. "They were talking about how they were having planning sessions for their school to help make them more climate friendly, more climate resilient and I wanted to see how I could help that in Winchester."

Plosky said she learned that was an area the committee was already exploring and she thought her skill set, what she's learned from working online with other communities, could be an asset for Winchester.

When Select Board member Bill McGonigle asked Plosky how she'd been contributing in the larger groups, she said mostly as a listener, trying to learn from others and see what she could take from them to use in Winchester.

Along with a school resilience committee, Plosky said she also served on a transportation committee with the Massachusetts Sierra Club aimed at getting legislators to help clean up transportation.

"One of the big things that I've personally worked on this past year is trying to get more funding for electric school buses, and trying to urge school districts to apply for that funding," she said. "I'm also on the plant-based planet team trying to encourage plant-based eating throughout Massachusetts, and I've been trying just mainly advocacy, spreading the word about things that people can do."

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Select Board member Michael Bettencourt made the motion to appoint Bialiauskaya to the Climate Action Committee, but not before encouraging Plosky to remain involved.

“Unfortunately, we can’t keep on adding student positions to this committee,” he said adding, “we always get in this predicament because everyone is so qualified and so engaged so thank you so much for being willing to serve.”

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